

ENGLEWOOD, CHATHAM, AUBURN GRESHAM

Auburn Gresham's Healthy Lifestyle Hub Will Open This Month On 79th Street, Bringing New Life To A Long-Vacant Building

The hub will bring a pharmacy, doctor's office, bank, restaurant and a Chicago Bears-backed teaching kitchen to the South Side community, which has been devastated by closures and vacant storefronts.

Atavia Reed 7:54 AM CDT on Jul 8, 2022



Credit: Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago

Renovation work is done on 839 W. 79th St. in Auburn Gresham on Aug. 25, 2021.

Credibility: Original Reporting Sources Cited



AUBURN GRESHAM — A South Side healthy living center will soon open on 79th Street, bringing neighborhood essentials to the community, nearly two years after winning a \$10 million citywide prize.

The Healthy Lifestyle Hub, 839 W. 79th St., will open July 29, said Carlos Nelson, director of the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation.

The development corporation, which spearheaded the hub, will celebrate the grand opening with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, Nelson said. A time has yet to be determined.



 greater auburn gresham DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION 839 W 79TH St, Chicago, Illinois 60620 AG Healthy Lifestyle Building

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Credit: Provided

The four-story Healthy Lifestyle Hub will house a myriad of tenants, including Mikkey's Retro Grill, Bank of America, UI Health, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Illinois and a UIC Neighborhood Center. The Illinois Tollway will train Black and Brown community members at the hub for jobs with the organization, Nelson said.

A UI Health Clinic and Urgent Care Center will occupy the entire second floor and a portion of the third. The clinic will offer medical, dental and mental health services. It's expected to serve more than 30,000 patients per year, Nelson said.



A high-tech kitchen and training center sponsored by the Chicago Bears will open on the first floor, giving local chefs, neighbors and students a place to master healthy cooking. A cafe has already been built to house a local coffee shop. The hub will also offer free wifi throughout the building.

Nelson said the best charm of all will be the 18-by-18-foot windows on the first floor. The oversized windows will “bring in light and light up 79th Street and Auburn Gresham, figuratively and literally,” Nelson said.

“We didn’t design this based on fear,” Nelson said. “We want floor-to-ceiling windows. We want windows all over the damn place. We want residents to know that this is a community just like Downtown, West Loop or any other community that is on the rise and has a high quality of life.”



—PLG—
PLANNING LANDSCAPE GROUP

Credit: Provided

The site of the hub was once home to the Rusnak Bros. Furniture Store and Showroom, which opened in 1925. The building had bricked-in windows on almost every floor with ground-floor retail, Nelson said.



In the 1970s, the building became a dark public aid office with no windows, Nelson said.

For years, the building stood vacant. But once the development corporation got to work, they used “a lot of money and a lot of time” to restore it and add something new, Nelson said.

They took “painstaking measures to preserve the terra cotta of this building” and “cored out” the center of the building to add an elevator, Nelson said. They also “blasted out windows” on every floor, he said.



Credit: Provided

Critical funding and donations helped the development corporation reconstruct and preserve the nearly 100-year-old building, Nelson said.

In 2020, the Healthy Lifestyle Hub was the winner of the Pritzker Traubert Foundation’s \$10 million Chicago Prize. The hub also received \$4 million from the city’s Invest South/West program.




The Bears donated more than \$600,000 to power the high-tech kitchen, Nelson said. Companies like Whirlpool and Kohler donated appliances and fixtures for the bathrooms and offices, as well.

The hub will shift the narrative for neighbors who have only seen a looming, vacant building in their community, Nelson said.

“Almost 30 graduating classes at Leo High School have walked past this bricked-up vacant building, and it became a backdrop of their existence,” Nelson said. “For me, it was important for us to design this from a standpoint that says, ‘Hey, kids, we live in a place that is just like the West Loop.’”



 greater auburn gresham development corporation 839 W 79TH St, Chicago, Illinois 60620 AG Healthy Lifestyle Building

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The Healthy Hub is one of several projects the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation has up its sleeve, Nelson said.

Of the \$10 million awarded by the Pritzker Traubert Foundation, about \$5 million went to the Green Era Campus, a renewable energy and urban farm development at 650 W. 83rd St. conceived by the Auburn Gresham group and nonprofits U Growers Collective and Green Era Partners, Nelson said.



And \$1 million will go toward transforming the vacant 300,000-square-foot Calumet High School, 8131 S. May St., into “something that benefits the community, and the community has ownership of,” Nelson said.

The group will also try to repurpose vacant storefronts in the community.

In recent years, a Save A Lot grocery store, a CVS, a Bank of America branch and a BJ’s Market & Bakery have closed. Most recently, a local Aldi unexpectedly shuttered, shocking neighbors.

The Healthy Lifestyle Hub will bring a pharmacy and bank back to the community. The corporation is working to “address the food insecurity piece,” Nelson said.

And if all goes well, vacant stores like the CVS and Bank of America will become health and wellness campuses operated by the corporation, Nelson said.

“If there was a local entity or owner that had ownership in the community, we likely wouldn’t have woken up to a vacant 13,000-square-foot building,” Nelson said. “We’re really promoting community ownership. Building local wealth is at the forefront of our efforts.”





Credit: Colin Boyle/Block Club Chicago

The city-owned vacant land at 838-58 W. 79th St. in Auburn Gresham on Aug. 25, 2021.

Across the street from the hub, Auburn Gardens, a \$40 million affordable housing development, will spring to life. Down the street, a \$35 million Metra station is set for 2024.

Soon, neighbors will have all their needs just steps from their homes. Auburn Gresham is on the move, Nelson said.

“My goal is that through homeownership and building wealth in the community, we can show other folks that you can afford one of the homes, one of the bungalows, and buy your first home in Auburn Gresham,” Nelson said.

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Atavia Reed

Atavia Reed is a reporter for Block Club Chicago, covering the Englewood, Auburn Gresham and Chatham neighborhoods.

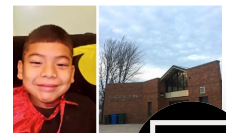
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After 15-Year-Old Boy Shot And Killed In Warren Park, Family Tries To Raise Funds For Burial

Anthony Mendoza was fatally shot while sitting in Warren Park, according to authorities. "He was smart, funny, athletic and such a sweet boy," his mother said on GoFundMe.



Joe Ward 1 hour ago

PILSEN, LITTLE VILLAGE, WEST LOOP

First Chicago Vintage Festival Brings Retro Fashion, Handmade Art to Pilsen

The event runs this weekend, highlighting more than 50 local vendors who sell vintage goods.

Kayleigh Padar 1 hour ago



ENGLEWOOD, CHATHAM, AUBURN GRESHAM

Black-Owned Company Wants To Reopen Closed South Side Save A Lot That 'Did Not Meet Our Moral Standards'

Yellow Banana hopes to redesign the entire store and offer a greater variety of affordable food if it's able to acquire the vacant building.

Kayleigh Padar 1 hour ago



ENGLEWOOD, CHATHAM, AUBURN GRESHAM

Englewood's Nature Trail Is Being Designed For Neighbors, By Neighbors: 'I'm Happy Something Positive Is Coming Here'

Neighbors said they want a safe trail where children can play and families can stroll and shop from local vendors. "This trail will give people something to look forward to," a neighbor said.

Atavia Reed 1 hour ago



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